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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 002768

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SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH'S MAY 26 MEETING WITH CONGRESSMEN
ISSA AND DAVIS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Congressman Darrell Issa and Congressman Tom Davis met on May 26 with King Abdullah and Foreign Minister Muasher. The focus of both discussions was how to move forward on the peace process. The Congressmen also asked the King for his impressions of Syrian President Bashar Asad.
End Summary.

KING ADVOCATES TWO TRACK APPROACH TO PEACE

2. (C) In a May 26 meeting with Congressman Darrell Issa and Congressman Tom Davis, King Abdullah reiterated his support for the Arab League initiative, and voiced support for a two-track approach to the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). The first track would focus solely on a Palestinian-Israeli peace process, while the second track, which he labeled the Arab-Israeli track, would focus on negotiations between Syria and Israel on the Golan Heights. King Abdullah told the Congressmen that by having two tracks, the Syrians would not be able to hijack the process and stall progress on Israeli-Palestinian issues. Because they would have their own track, the Syrians would remain engaged and would "behave".

3. (C) When queried about his relationship with Syrian President Bashar Asad, King Abdullah said Asad was impressive when he was by himself, but noted that there was still uncertainty about Asad's authority to challenge the old guard. King Abdullah said that he and Crown Prince Abdullah can play "good cop, bad cop" with Asad. Crown Prince Abdullah has the capability to assert more direct pressure on Asad while King Abdullah can bridge the generational gap and take a more collegial approach.

4. (C) In response to Congressman Issa's suggestion that the GOJ and Egypt send troops to the West Bank to work with the Palestinian Authority to improve security, King Abdullah said that it would be politically impossible for Jordan to insert troops into the West Bank. "We can not trade Israeli tanks for Jordanian ones." When Congressman Issa suggested that Jordan establish training camps in Jordan to help train Palestinian security forces, King Abdullah replied that the GOJ had trained a brigade of Palestinian special forces during the 1993-94 post-Oslo timeframe, but Arafat rejected them because he questioned their loyalty. The unit remains in Jordan, but according to the King, could be inserted into the West Bank if Arafat would allow it.

FM: MUST BUILD POWERBASE OF THOSE AROUND ARAFAT...QUIETLY

5. (C) Congressmen Issa and Davis also met with Foreign Minister Muasher on May 26. FM Muasher said that, to push the peace process forward again, there needs to be movement on three different fronts: the Arab League initiative, Palestinian Authority reform, and the renunciation of extremism. The FonMin underscored the importance of the Arab League Initiative, stressing that it gives both Israelis and Arabs what they need. He predicted that in the next few months, King Abdullah is going to take the Arab Initiative directly to the Israeli public via the Israeli media. He also noted that while no Israeli politician had publicly endorsed the proposal, Israeli polls in the past few weeks show growing public support for the initiative.

6. (C) FM Muasher also expressed optimism about the prospects for reform in the Palestinian Authority. The FonMin relayed that during a recent visit, all of the people around Arafat "were challenging him publicly, in front of us." He suggested that there was momentum in the Palestinian Authority to force Arafat along the road to reform, but the FM stressed that the move towards reform must be seen as coming from inside, not directed from the outside.

7. (C) The FonMin said the GOJ would encourage the Palestinians to take a strong stand against extremist groups.

He said Saudi Arabia and Egypt--by taking strong actions against extremists in their own country-- provided the umbrella the Palestinians need to act against these organizations. He commented that without a credible peace process that defines the endgame, however, the Palestinians cannot effectively act.

18. (C) Congressmen Issa and Davis did not have an opportunity to clear this message before their departure.
Gnehm